

LAMENTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Lamentations normally and naturally follows the prophecy of Jeremiah. In this little book the soul of the prophet is laid bare before us. These are the lamentations of Jeremiah.

Dr. Alexander Whyte, one of the great expositors of the Word of God of days gone by, has said: "There is nothing like the Lamentations of Jeremiah in the whole world. There has been plenty of sorrow in every age, and in every land, but such another preacher and author, with such a heart for sorrow, has never again been born. Dante comes next to Jeremiah, and we know that Jeremiah was the great exile's favorite prophet."

Jeremiah began his ministry during the reign of Josiah. Both he and Josiah were young men, and they were evidently friends. It was Josiah who led the last revival in Judah. It was a revival in which a great many hearts were touched, but on the whole it proved to be largely a surface movement. Josiah met his untimely death in the battle at Megiddo against Pharaoh-nechoh, a battle that Josiah never should have been in. Jeremiah, however, continued his prophetic ministry during the reigns of the four wretched kings who followed Josiah: Jehoahaz, Jeoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. His was a harsh message as he attempted to call his people and his nation back to God, but he was never able to deter the downward course of Judah. He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem; and as he saw it burn, he sat down in the warm ashes, hot tears coursing down his cheeks.

The Book of Lamentations is composed of five chapters, and each chapter is an elegy, almost a funeral dirge. These elegies are sad beyond description. In them we see Jeremiah as he stood over Jerusalem weeping. This book is filled with tears and sorrow. It is a paean of pain, a poem of pity, a proverb of pathos. It is a hymn of heartbreak, a psalm of sadness, a symphony of sorrow, and a story of sifting. Lamentations is the wailing wall of the Bible.

Lamentations moves us into the very heart of Jeremiah. He gave a message from God that actually broke his heart. How tragic and wretched he was. If you were to pour his tears into a test tube to analyze them from a scientific viewpoint and determine how much sodium chloride, or salt, they contained, you still would not know the sorrow and the heartbreak of this man. He has been called the prophet of the broken heart. His was a life filled with pathos and pity. His sobbing was a solo. Ella Wheeler Wilcox has written a piece of doggerel that goes like this:

Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone:
For this sad old earth must borrow its mirth,
But it has trouble enough of its own.

Tears are generally conceded to be a sign of weakness, crying is effeminate, and bawling is for babies. Years ago when I was pastor of a church here in Pasadena where I still live, the playground for our summer Bible school was right outside my study window. One

little boy brought his even younger sister, and it was interesting to watch how he hovered over her and watched after her. Neither one of them was very big. But one day she fell on the asphalt and scratched her knee. She began to cry, as a little child would. He tried to give her a sales talk in order to quiet her down. Oh, she shouldn't cry, he said, only women cry. Well, I don't know what he thought she was, but nevertheless it worked, and she stopped crying.

This man Jeremiah had a woman's heart. He was sensitive. He was sincere. He was sympathetic. He was as tender as a mother. Yet he gave the strongest and harshest message in the Bible: he announced the destruction of Jerusalem, and he pronounced judgment, counseling the people to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar. His message did nothing but get him into all kinds of trouble.

Now what kind of a man would you have chosen to deliver such a rough, brutal, tough message as that? Would you have wanted Attila the Hun or a Hitler or a Mussolini? Of one thing I am sure: none of us would send Casper Milquetoast to give the message! But God did choose such a man, a man with a tender heart.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan tells the story about Dr. Dale of Birmingham who used to say that Dwight L. Moody was the only man who seemed to him to have the right to preach about hell. When someone asked Dr. Dale why he said that, he replied, "Because he always preaches it with tears in his voice." That is the type of man God wants today. We have too many who are not moved by the message they give.

David Garrick, one of the great Shakespearean actors of the past, told about the day he was walking down the street in London and found a man standing on the corner just yearning over the people. Garrick said, "I stood on the outside of the crowd, but I found myself imperceptibly working my way in, until I stood right under that man, and there came down from his breast hot tears." He went on to say that there was a woman there, pointing her shaking, withered finger at the man who spoke, and she said, "Sir, I have followed you since you preached this morning at seven o'clock and I have heard you preach five times in the streets of this city, and five times I have been wet with your tears. Why do you weep?" That preacher was George Whitefield, a cross-eyed man who was burlesqued on the English stage and denounced from almost every pulpit in the country. David Garrick went on to say, "I listened to George Whitefield, and as I listened to him I saw his passion and his earnestness. I knew that he meant that without Christ men would die. As I listened to him, he came to the place where he could say nothing more. He reached up those mighty arms, his voice seemed almost like a thunderstorm as he said one final word: 'Oh!' " Why, he could break an audience with that word! When George Whitefield said "Oh!" men bowed before the Holy Spirit like corn bows under the wind. Garrick went on, "I would give my hand full of golden sovereigns if I could say 'Oh!' like George Whitefield. I would be the greatest actor that the world has ever known." The only difference was that George Whitefield was sincere -- he was not acting. Jeremiah was that kind of a preacher also.

I am afraid that we have developed a generation in our day that has no feeling, no compassion for this lost world. There is little concern for getting out the Word of God. There is little attention given to moral fiber or a high sense of duty.

Several years ago in a Reader's Digest article, young people were counseled that their highest chances of success in life would be found "by engaging in work you most enjoy doing, and which gives fullest expression to your abilities and personality." If Jeremiah had read that article and heeded its advice, he probably would have gone into some other kind of business. But Jeremiah could say that it was the Word of God that he rejoiced in: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts" ([Jer. 15:16](#)). How wonderful this man was!

The young people today who have been trained -- even many in Christian work -- are simply looking for a job where they can punch a clock, go home to watch TV, and forget all about it. They hold their feelings and emotions in reserve and are unwilling to become really involved in getting out the Word of God.

I don't always understand Jeremiah, but I admire him and look up to him. Mrs. Elizabeth Cook wrote this about him:

A woman's heart -- tender and quick and warm;
But man's in iron will and courage strong.
His harp was set to weird, pathetic song,
Yet when time called for deeds, no wrathful storm
From throne or altar could his soul disarm --
His disheartening battle fierce and long.

This is Jeremiah, the man who had a sorrow.

Jeremiah reminds us of Another who sat weeping over Jerusalem. The only difference is that Jerusalem was in ruins and the temple already burned as Jeremiah gazed upon the debris. Jesus wept over the same city about six centuries later because of what was going to happen to her. To Jeremiah the destruction of Jerusalem was a matter of history. To Jesus the destruction of Jerusalem was a matter of prophecy.

The key verse in the Book of Lamentations explains the reason Jerusalem lay in ruin: "The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity" ([Lam. 1:18](#)).

Chapter 1

THEME: Elegy 1

The first elegy in Lamentations opens on a doleful note. Jeremiah is singing in a minor key.

How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary! [[Lam. 1:1](#)].

The great city of Jerusalem has fallen. What is the explanation? Jeremiah makes two tremendous statements that will help us understand.

Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: all that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward [[Lam. 1:8](#)].

"Jerusalem hath grievously sinned" -- this is the first explanation for the fall of the city. Her nakedness was revealed -- what a picture!

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger [[Lam. 1:12](#)].

People don't like to hear about the fierce anger of God today. That aspect is often left out of the gospel message, and I have observed this particularly in the religious programs that are shown on TV, even by so-called gospel churches. In one Christmas program I saw, they did say that Christ was born of a virgin and that He was God manifest in the flesh -- I rejoiced in that. But the program was a travesty of the gospel because it said that Christ came to give you a new personality, to bring peace and love -- and oh, how insipid it was! It was a message for comfort and for compromise. The excuse that is often given for such an approach with the gospel is that it is trying to reach the man of the world. Jeremiah, too, was trying to reach a lost world, and he wasn't very successful; but at least he gave God's message as God had given it to him. God judged Judah because of her sin, and He still will judge sin today.

The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity [[Lam. 1:18](#)].

Jeremiah mourned the destruction of Jerusalem alone. He stood among the ashes weeping. Why had the city been destroyed? The city had sinned. The second explanation is "The LORD is righteous." God did it, and God was right in what He did.

This is difficult to understand, and I must say I feel totally inadequate to deal with this. I merely stand at the fringe of the sorrow of this man and find I cannot enter in. I can merely look over the wall into his garden; I am not able to walk up and down in it. He has revealed two things to us, the bitter and the sweet: Jerusalem has sinned, yet God loves Jerusalem. "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned," and "the LORD is righteous." God loved them, He said, "with an everlasting love." He brought this upon them because He is righteous.

A statement from G. Campbell Morgan may help us to understand this. Of the revelation of God's anger, he said: "This is a supreme necessity in the interest of the universe. Prisons are in the interest of the free. Hell is the safeguard of heaven. A state that cannot punish crime is doomed; and a God Who tolerates evil is not good. Deny me my Biblical revelation of the anger of God, and I am insecure in the universe. But reveal to me this Throne established, occupied by One Whose heart is full of tenderness, Whose bowels yearn with love; then I am assured that He will not tolerate that which blights and blasts and damns; but will destroy it, and all its instruments, in the interest of that which is high and noble and pure" (Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah, p. 248).

You and I are living in a universe where there is a God, a living God, a God whose heart goes out in love and yearning over you. But I want to say this to you: if you turn your back on Him, He will judge you even though He still loves you. He is the righteous God of this universe. I am sure I understand all that, but I know it is what He says in His Word. Someday He will make it clear to us that hell is actually there because He is a God of love and a God of righteousness and a God of holiness. The whole universe, including Satan himself, will admit that God is righteous and just in all He does. My friend, God is so great and wonderful and good we dare not trifle with Him.

Jesus could say to the scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of His day, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" Why did He call them hypocrites? Because ". . . ye devour widows' houses . . ." ([Matt. 23:14](#)) -- that was one of the reasons. My friend, if your Christianity does not affect your heart, your life in your home and in your business, and your social life, then you are a hypocrite. I didn't say it; He said it, my beloved. And He is the One who wept over these men. My eyes are dry, but His eyes are filled with tears for you and for me today. Oh, my friend, don't turn your back on the God who loves you like this! It will be tragic indeed if you do.

God does what He does because He is a righteous God. He cannot shut his eyes to evil. When His own children disobey Him, God must discipline them, even though it breaks His heart. Jeremiah reveals to us the heart of God: when Jeremiah weeps, God is weeping; when he sorrows, God is sorrowing. When we don't understand what is happening, the important thing is to trust in knowing that God is righteous in what He does. Although it broke His heart, He was right in letting Jerusalem be destroyed and in letting the people go into captivity.

G. Smith wrote a poem about Jerusalem that gives us some insight into this man Jeremiah:

I am the man sore smitten with the wrath
Of Him who fashion'd me; my heart is faint,
And crieth out, "Spare, spare, O God! Thy saint";
But yet with darkness doth He hedge my path.
My eyes with streams of fiery tears run down
To see the daughter of my people slain,
And in Jerusalem the godless reign;
Trouble on trouble are upon me thrown.
Mine adversaries clap their sinful hands
The while they hiss and wag their heads, and say,
"Where is the temple but of yesterday --
The noblest city of a hundred lands?"
We do confess our guilt; then, Lord, arise,
Avenge, avenge us of our enemies!

Jeremiah cries out -- he wants to know why, and God assures him that He is righteous, right, in what He is doing to Jerusalem.

Another anguished question that Jeremiah has is this: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" ([v. 12](#)). In other words, How much are the people involved? Do they really care?

Man does not want to accept the fact that God is angry with sin. Instead, the fact that God is love is played for all it's worth. I agree that God is love, and the church certainly needs to learn to take the love of God into the marketplace of life. We have often failed to do that, but I feel that it has led to an overemphasis on the love of God in this generation. God is righteous, and God is holy, and God is just in what He does.

The question remains: How do you feel about your sin and God's anger toward it? Is it nothing to you? Jeremiah sat weeping over the city. There were not many others weeping with him. Oh, we are told in [Psalm 137](#) that the captives who had been taken to Babylon sat down and wept when they remembered Zion. They cried out for vengeance, and I feel they had a perfect right to do that, but was there any genuine repentance? Or was it the repentance of a thief who is merely sorry he has been caught but does not repent of his thievery? The people who were carried into captivity wept. But Jeremiah, who did not go into captivity, wept also over the debris, the wreckage, the ashes, and ruins of the city. He was a free man, but he was moved, he was involved, and he was concerned.

Again, may I refer to the religious programs we have on television in our day. They are often finished, polished, and professional in their presentation. I think it is a credit to the church to do something in a professional way -- that is good and right -- but I am concerned that there was one word I did not hear: the word sin. Their message did not emphasize at all that God is righteous and He must punish our sin.

The virgin birth, the deity of Christ, His death and resurrection are all important, but the question is: Why did He die? That is the question raised in [Psalm 22:1](#), "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? . . ." Our Lord said that while He was hanging on the Cross. We find the answer to that question in the same psalm: "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel" ([Ps. 22:3](#), italics mine). He is holy. He is righteous. Christ died on that Cross because you and I are sinners, hell-doomed sinners.

Look at the cross today -- "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" ([v. 12](#)). He didn't have to die. He suffered as no man has had to suffer. God forsook Him, but God will never forsake you as long as you live. He forsook Christ so that He would not have to forsake you. May I ask you, is it nothing to you?

McCheyne was a wonderful man of God in the past who had a real experience with the Lord. He wrote a poem about Jehovah-Tsidkenu, which means "the Lord our Righteousness" (see [Jer. 23:6](#); [Jer. 33:16](#)), and Dr. H. A. Ironside quoted it in Notes on the Prophecy and Lamentations of Jeremiah (pp. 315, 316).

I oft read with pleasure, to soothe or engage,
Isaiah's wild measure, or John's simple page:
But e'en when they pictured the blood-sprinkled tree,
Jehovah Tsidkenu was nothing to me.
Like tears from the daughters of Zion that roll,
I wept when the waters went over His soul;
Yet thought not that my sins had nailed to the tree
Jehovah Tsidkenu: 'twas nothing to me.
When free grace awoke me by light from on high,
Then legal fears shook me -- I trembled to die.
No refuge, no safety in self could I see;
Jehovah Tsidkenu my Saviour must be.

My terrors all vanished before that sweet name;
My guilty fears banished, with boldness I came,
To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free;
Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me.

My friend, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" Have you come to Jesus just to get a new personality? To bring a little peace into your soul, or to create a little love on your altar? Is that the reason He died on the Cross? Will you hear me, my friend? He died on the Cross to save you from hell.

The Holy Spirit has come into the world to reveal Christ as Savior, and He has come to convict the world of sin. What kind of sin? Murder? Thievery? Yes, but something is worse than that: they sinned ". . . because they believe not on me" ([John 16:9](#), italics mine). God has a remedy for the thief. The thief on the cross was saved. I think Paul was guilty of murder, that he was responsible for the death of Stephen, but he got saved. Moses also was a murderer. God has a remedy for the murderer, the thief, and the liar, but God does not have a remedy for the man who rejects Jesus Christ. That is the greatest sin you can commit.

Rejection of Christ is a state rather than an act. You can never commit the act of rejecting Christ, but you can gradually come to the place where Christ and what He has done for you is absolutely meaningless. Jerusalem reached the place where God told Jeremiah, "Don't be disturbed that they are not listening to you. If Moses or Elijah or Samuel were here to pray for them, I would not answer their prayers either. It is too late; they have crossed over." There are many living in our sophisticated day who have crossed over to that place.

Now we cannot judge when a man has reached the point of having totally rejected Christ. I have seen the conversion of many folk whom I'm sure I would have considered to be hopeless cases. One man I know of who lived in the San Francisco Bay area was on drugs and was guilty of several crimes, but he was marvelously and wonderfully converted. So neither you nor I are the ones to say that someone has stepped over that line, but it does happen.

Jerusalem had rejected God. An individual can reject God. What does Jesus Christ mean to you? What does His death mean to you? "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" ([v. 12](#)).

Chapter 2

THEME: Elegy 2

The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath
swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds,
and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and
lamentation [[Lam. 2:5](#)].

God took full responsibility for what Nebuchadnezzar did. God allowed him to destroy the city of Jerusalem. God used him as a rod, just as He had used the Assyrians against Israel for their punishment.

Have you ever stopped to think in your own personal life why God permits certain people to cross your path? Do you wish that you had never met certain people? Are there people whom you would call your enemies? Someone may have caused you sorrow, but it is all for His purpose. God has permitted all that for a definite purpose. Learn to recognize the hand of God in your life.

The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as in the day of a solemn feast [[Lam. 2:7](#)].

The very temple which God had blessed -- He had given the instructions for building it, His very presence had been there at one time -- now He says, "The day came that I abhorred that temple."

Churchgoing folk need to investigate their own lives. If you go to church, is that something that God takes delight in? Or is it actually something that hurts His cause? Is your frame of mind right when you go, or are you critical? Can the Spirit of God use you? I think that it can even be sinful to go to church. Do you know where the most dangerous place was the night Jesus was arrested? Was it down with that bunch of rascals who were plotting His death? No, my friend, the most dangerous place that night was in the Upper Room where Jesus was! Do you know why? Satan was there. He put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Him, and he also got into the heart of Simon Peter to deny Him. Just because you are going to church doesn't mean you are pleasing God.

The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground [[Lam. 2:10](#)].

All the people went through the outward gyrations of grief, but notice how Jeremiah was affected:

Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city [[Lam. 2:11](#)].

"Mine eyes do fail with tears" -- he cried so much he couldn't even see. "My bowels are troubled" -- this thing tore him to pieces, it wrecked his health. He was involved; it broke his heart.

How many of us are willing to be really involved in God's work? Are we willing to endanger our health? Are we willing to give ourselves over to God?

All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth? [[Lam. 2:15](#)].

The enemy without is elated at the misery of Jerusalem.

I am sometimes severe in my comments about the condition of the church in our day. I am retired from the active pastorate -- although I am not retired from the work of God -- and I need to ask myself how involved I am with my brethren who are in the ministry? When I see the problems in the church today, is it nothing to me? Do I just sit on the sidelines as a critic, or does it bring sorrow to my heart? I can say that I have been moved, and I want to be an encouragement to the many wonderful Bible-teaching pastors in our country. It is too easy to be harsh in our criticism when it means nothing to us at all.

Chapter 3

THEME: Elegy 3

Each one of the chapters in this little Book of Lamentations forms an acrostic. That is, there are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and each of the twenty-two verses in each chapter begins with the succeeding letter. However, in this chapter there are sixty-six verses, which means that there are three verses that begin with each letter of the alphabet.

I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.

He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.

Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day.

My flesh and my skin hath he made old: he hath broken my bones
[\[Lam. 3:1-4\]](#).

This man Jeremiah has seen and gone through great trouble. His health is wrecked because of his concern for Jerusalem. Jeremiah was not unmoved by the destruction he had seen come to the nation. He did not run around saying, "I told you so!" Actually, he was heartbroken. His response also shows us how God feels. God is not removed; He goes with those who are His own. The Lord Jesus said, ". . . I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" ([Heb. 13:5](#)). Whatever you are going through, you can be sure He is there.

This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him
[\[Lam. 3:21-24\]](#).

If I were to give a title to these last three chapters of Lamentations, it would be, "When Tomorrows Become Yesterdays." Jeremiah is now looking back upon the past. He had predicted the judgment that came upon Jerusalem, and Jeremiah sits in the rubble and ruin of Jerusalem weeping as he writes this lamentation.

These verses are the only bright spot in all of the five lamentations. "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." In spite of the severe judgment of God -- and many thought it was too severe -- Jeremiah can see the hand of God's mercy. They would have been utterly consumed had it not been for the mercy of God. If they had received their just deserts, they would have been utterly destroyed -- they would have disappeared from the earth.

Was Judah's deliverance from such a fate due to something in them? No, it was all due to the faithfulness of God. He had promised Abraham that He would make a nation come from him -- and this was the nation. He had promised Moses that He would put them into the land. He had promised Joshua that He would establish them there. He promised David that there would come One in his line to reign on the throne forever. The prophets all said that God would not utterly destroy this people but that He would judge them for their sin. God is faithful. He has judged them, but He will not utterly destroy them. A faithful remnant has always remained, and ultimately they will become a great nation again.

Will God judge America? A great many people think not, but I think He will.

Chapter 4

THEME: Elegy 4

This fourth lamentation is a meditation. Sitting amidst the debris and ashes of Jerusalem, Jeremiah describes the horror of the destruction of his city and the carrying into captivity of the people by Nebuchadnezzar. It is so terrifying that I might be tempted to shun giving such a doomsday message. But we need to face up to the fact that God is a righteous God as well as a God of love. God judges sin, and He is righteous in doing so. Judah did not receive full judgment because of the mercies of God. Habbakuk said, "... in wrath remember mercy" ([Hab. 3:2](#)). God never forgets to be merciful. There is always a way out for God's people if they will come God's way.

How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!
the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every
street.

The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they
esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!
[[Lam. 4:1-2](#)].

Jeremiah is comparing gold to the young men of Zion. The fine young men of Judah who were like gold vessels are now like earthen vessels of clay. They have been broken. That is the terrifying thing about warfare: it eliminates the finest young men of a nation.

We are a proud people in this country. Even Christians are told that they need to think well of themselves. I heard of a Christian psychologist who teaches that you should get up every morning, look in the mirror, and say, "I love you!" Well, a lot of the saints don't need to be told that -- they already love themselves! The apostle Paul says that we are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. If we don't think of ourselves more highly than we ought, we will find that we are merely clay vessels. In 2 Timothy Paul

likens the believer to a clay vessel. However, the issue is not of what material the vessels are made, but how they are being used. Are we vessels for the Master's use or for our own use?

At the wedding in Cana of Galilee the Lord Jesus had the servants bring out those old beaten water pots, which had apparently been stuck back in a corner until after the wedding. He used those old pots to supply the crowd with drink. He could use those pots, but He had to fill them with water. The water is the Word of God. When we, as old water pots, get filled with the Word of God, God can use us.

The young men of Judah had not been serving God, and they were now just broken pieces of pottery. What a tragic picture this is!

The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them [[Lam. 4:4](#)].

The siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar was a horrible thing. The people suffered inside the city. Instead of surrendering, they held out and saw their little babies die. Shakespeare has Lady Macbeth say: "I have given suck and know How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me: I would, while it was smiling in my face, Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums, And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you" (Macbeth, [Act 1](#), scene 7). That is a bitter awful thing! But don't point your finger back to the terrible things these people did, for today, my friend, abortion is the murder of little children.

They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets: they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills [[Lam. 4:5](#)].

They had lived in luxury, they had had big supermarkets, but now the shelves of the supermarkets are bare. They no longer can enjoy the conveniences they once had -- in fact, they don't have any at all.

Have you ever stopped to think what could happen to the place where you live? Suppose those supermarket shelves which now groan with food were all empty next week when you do your shopping. Suppose you flipped the switch in your home and the lights did not come on. Suppose there was no heat, no air conditioning, no gas for the automobile. A howl of despair would go up in this nation. We would be a helpless people. That's what happened to Jerusalem. God judged them.

For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her [[Lam. 4:6](#)].

God judged Sodom and Gomorrah, but God judged Jerusalem more severely. Why was that? Because the sin of Jerusalem was worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by homosexuality. That is an awful sin, but there is something worse than that. It is worse for a man to sit in the church pew and hear the gospel and do nothing about it. That might be true of someone reading this book. Jesus Christ died for you. God is merciful to you today, and you have turned your back on Him. When God judges, your judgment will be more severe than for the heathen in Africa or in

the islands of the sea. Don't worry about the heathen out there; worry about yourself. How have you responded to God's offer of grace in Jesus Christ?

Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire [[Lam. 4:7](#)].

Boy, they looked good, didn't they? Religion today looks good. We have new churches today -- new sanctuaries and nice Christian education buildings where we have a place to play volleyball and basketball. We've got a baseball team. We have a nice room for banquets. It all looks good on the outside. Now Jeremiah is saying that a Nazarite was one who took a voluntary oath, and many did it. They were complimented; they looked good, you know. But it was all on the outside; their hearts were not changed. While it is wonderful to have beautiful churches -- I'm not opposed to them; I'm excited about them - - it is tragic when the people on the inside are not new creatures in Christ Jesus. They are still doing the same old sins. That is the picture Jeremiah gives us of the people of Judah.

They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field [[Lam. 4:9](#)].

Even though Jeremiah has witnessed the awful destruction of Jerusalem and those who had died, he says he would rather be dead than alive, for the condition of those who remained was so terrible.

The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people [[Lam. 4:10](#)].

The same thing took place when Titus destroyed Jerusalem in B.C. 70. The people got so hungry that mothers had to give their own babies to be eaten! We look back and think how horrible this was but today many mothers are having abortions, actually murdering their babies. If we don't want a baby, we must take responsibility for our actions before a baby becomes a reality. God has made us capable of having babies and when one has been conceived, it is His intention for that child to come into the world. The moment the child is conceived, he is a person and to abort a pregnancy is murder of a human being.

For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her [[Lam. 4:13](#)].

Because the false prophets and the priests did not tell the people the truth, they were guilty of murder -- that is God's estimate of it. A preacher who won't preach the Word of God and tell the people how they might be saved is put in this classification. I didn't say that -- God said it. God says if you don't give out the Word of God, you are guilty.

The anger of the LORD hath divided them; he will no more regard them: they respected not the persons of the priests, they favoured not the elders [[Lam. 4:16](#)].

The people paid no attention to the priests who were giving out the Word of God. Jeremiah was a prophet of God, and they paid no attention to him at all. God judged the people for that.

As for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help: in our watching
we have watched for a nation that could not save us [[Lam. 4:17](#)].

This is something the modern nation of Israel needs to learn. God did not put them back in the land in 1948; the United Nations made them a nation, and since that time they have never known one minute of peace. There have been wars and threats of war continually. They have not turned to God, and God did not put them back into the land.

Don't misunderstand me, I think the return of the Jews to Israel was a tremendous thing. Dr. W. F. Albright has made this statement: "It is without parallel in the annals of human history that a nation carried into captivity for seventy years should return to resume its national life, and that after nearly six hundred years, this same nation should again be scattered worldwide for nearly two thousand years and retain its identity." To see how God has dealt with this nation has caused many to turn to Him.

The Lord says that the problem was that Judah was looking to Egypt for help, and Egypt was not a help; they were an enemy. The United States should recognize that it is not the war machines we need to give to Israel. We need to give them the Word of God, the Word which they gave to us so many years ago.

The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in
their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among
the heathen [[Lam. 4:20](#)].

What a picture of that people as they are today! They are scattered among the heathen.

The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of
Zion; he will no more carry thee away into captivity: he will visit
thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; he will discover thy sins [[Lam. 4:22](#)].

After the judgment, God promises that He will permanently place them in the land.

Chapter 5

THEME: Elegy 5

This fifth and final lamentation is a prayer of Jeremiah.

Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold
our reproach [[Lam. 5:1](#)].

Judah had lost the honor and respect which she had had among the nations.

They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of
Judah.

Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not
honoured.

They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the
wood [[Lam. 5:11-13](#)].

Their women were ravished, and their princes hanged; they had lost everything. The young men who survived were put into slavery to work for Nebuchadnezzar.

The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning
[[Lam. 5:15](#)].

The joy of their hearts had ceased.

Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation.

Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?

Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old [[Lam. 5:19-21](#)].

This is the prayer of Jeremiah for his people. We could learn a lesson from this: before it is too late, we had better turn to the Lord.

Daniel Webster made this statement many years ago, and it sounds like a prophecy: "If religious books are not circulated among the masses and the people do not turn to God, I do not know what is to become of us as a nation. If truth be not diffused, error will be. If God and His Word are not received, the devil and his works will gain the ascendancy. If the evangelical volume does not reach every hamlet, the pages of a corrupt and licentious literature will. If the power of the gospel is not felt through the length and the breadth of the land, anarchy, misrule, degradation, misery, corruption, and darkness will reign without mitigation or end." What a picture! We are living in a day when you cannot read the Bible in the schools, but pornography is permitted because we must be free to do what we want to do! Well, can't some of us have the Bible in our schools, especially when it is desired by the majority?

When our great nation was founded during the period from 1775 to 1787, the following statement by Benjamin Franklin was still widely accepted: "The longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of the truth that God governs in the affairs of men." Unless a marked change takes place in the United States of America, it's doomed just as sure as was ancient Babylon.

Dr. Machen said, "America is coasting downhill on a godly ancestry." Now we have reached the bottom of the hill. What a message Lamentations would have for us today, but it will not be selected as the Book of the Month or the Book of the Year. It is unfortunate that we will not listen.

Bibliography

(For Bibliography to Lamentations, see Bibliography at the end of Jeremiah.)